

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00848 160810Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ISO-00 EB-08 USIA-06 CTME-00 TRSE-00
/035 W

-----037541 162154Z /70

R 160622Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6816
USDOC WASHDC
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
AMEMBASSY DOHA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY SANA
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USINT BAGHDAD

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NEA/ARN FOR MONROE; NEA/RA FOR MORRISON

E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: BBSR BTRA LE
SUBJ: PROPOSED ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MISSION TO U.S.

REF: (A) BEIRUT 0763, (B) BEIRUT 0248
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1. ECONOFF CALLED ON PRESIDENT BEIRUT CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE & INDUSTRY KASSAR FEBRUARY 14 TO EXPLORE DETAILS
OF UNION OF ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (UACC) MEETING IN
AMMAN FEBRUARY 4 - 6. KASSAR SAID MEETING WELL ATTENDED
WITH ONLY "MINOR STATES," INCLUDING BOTH YEMENS AND
SOMALIA ABSENT. MR. MOHAMED BAGHAL OF USACC NEW YORK

REPRESENTED ORGANIZERS OF MASS DELEGATION. IRAQ WAS PRESENT AND RESERVED ITS POSITION ON PARTICIPATION IN THE "120-MAN MISSION" TO THE UNITED STATES. KUWAIT RAISED LONE VOICE IN FAVOR OF POSTPONING TRIP ON GROUNDS TIMING WAS BAD, CITING DISARRAY IN ARAB RANKS AS REASON. OTHER STATES OVERCAME KUWAIT'S POSITION, WITH LIBYA PARTICULARLY SUPPORTIVE OF THE TRIP.

2. ACCORDING TO KASSAR, MODERATE VOICES SOUGHT EMPHASIZE MISSION'S PURPOSE AS BEING TO STIMULATE U.S. CONTACT WITH AND AWARENESS OF ARAB MARKETS. STRONGER VOICES, INCLUDING THOSE OF "MAIN ARAB STATES, EGYPT EXCLUDED" INSISTED THAT PRINCIPLES OF ARAB BOYCOTT AND POTENTIAL LOSS OF ARAB MARKETS OWING TO U.S. LEGISLATION BE PRIMARY FOCUS OF TRIP. THOSE FAVORING BOYCOTT ORIENTATION PREVAILED.

3. KASSAR ASKED WHETHER U.S. SUPPORTED TRIP OR NOT. EMBOFF SAID THAT EMBASSY STRONGLY FAVORED GREATER CONTACT AND UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN U.S. AND ARAB BUSINESSMEN, AND WONDERED HOW PUBLIC RELATIONS ASPECT OF RATHER LARGE MISSION WERE TO BE HANDLED. KASSAR SAID THERE WAS NO REALISTIC PROSPECT OF COORDINATING DELEGATION MEMBERS IN THIS REGARD; THOSE WHO WERE APPROACHED INDIVIDUALLY FOR INTERVIEWS WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY SPEAK THEIR MINDS. LEBANESE DELEGATION WOULD SEEK LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SEPARATE ITSELF FROM ANY RADICAL VIEWS.

4. KASSAR FURNISHED EMBOFF WITH DETAILED SCHEDULE OF MISSION'S VISIT TO U.S. (COPY BEING POUCHED TO MONROE). LEBANESE DELEGATION WILL BE IN RANGE 14-20 PERSONS, REPRESENTING BEIRUT, TRIPOLI, SIDON AND ZAHLE CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE.

5. COMMENT: KASSAR IS AMIABLE AND SPEAKS ENGLISH WELL. HIS SECOND-IN-COMMAND, WALID NAJA, AND A STENOGRAPHER WERE ON HAND TO NOTE THE REMARKS. BOTH KASSAR AND NAJA FULLY AWARE OF PITFALLS INHERENT IN THIS MASS UNDERTAKING, BUT CONVERSATION CAREFULLY AVOIDED ALL DIRECT REFERENCE TO THE OBVIOUS. LATER IN HIS OWN OFFICE, NAJA SAID: "MANY OF THESE DELEGATES ARE ORDINARY PEOPLE, WITHOUT EXPERIENCE IN THE U.S. THIS COULD BE EMBARRASSING AND, FRANKLY, I MAY DECIDE NOT TO GO." NEVERTHELESS, THE TRIP AS A WHOLE LOOKS ALIVE AND WELL. PARKER

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